

4.  
A BRIEF  
DISSERTATION  
ON  
FUNERAL  
SOLEMNITIES.

IN A  
LETTER to a FRIEND.

---



---

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. BUCKLAND, at the *Buck* in  
*Pater-noster-Row*, and sold at the Pamphlet  
Shops at the *Royal Exchange*, *Temple-Bar*, and  
*Charing-Cross*. 1745.

[Price Six Pence.]

D

F

L

Y

*As*  
*The*

equ

him

the

the

tho

to

ciat

and



A B R I E F  
D I S S E R T A T I O N  
O N  
F U N E R A L S O L E M N I T I E S .  
I N A  
L E T T E R t o a F R I E N D .

S I R ,

**Y** O U lately observed with no small Concern, the pompous Interment of a noted *Free-Thinker*, whose infamous *Actions* were as large and extensive as his *Thoughts*, when many of his Brethren of equal Latitude in Principle and Practice with himself did him the Honour to accompany the *Herse*, and to see his Remains laid in the Vault ; and also heard him placed among those who shall have a glorious Resurrection to eternal Life ; the Clergyman who officiated pronouncing the Service in as devout and solemn a manner over the Corpse, as if

B

he

he had buried the *greatest Saint*. Tho' he was known not only to have ridiculed Christianity, but *all Religion* as *meer Priestcraft*, and bearing himself on a great Estate (being the richest in the whole Parish) frequently bullied the Minister on that Account, when he sent for him to dine at his own House. You told me, how it shock'd you to over-hear one of the Gentleman's intimate Associates say to several others, that *Jack* had made a Fool of the Doctor after his *Death*, as well as in his *Life-time*. For notwithstanding all his *Cant* about Repentance and Good Works, and the Necessity of a virtuous Conversation in this World in order to Happiness in the next, which *Jack* only gave him the Hearing of, and laugh'd at him for, to his Face, as well as behind his Back; see, said he, how safely the Parson has sent him to Heaven, tho' *Jack*, I am sure, had no Thoughts of going thither, because he would not believe there was *any such Place*. Some indeed had insinuated, as if he chang'd his Sentiments and was got into a different Way, both of thinking and acting; but this, he said, to his Knowledge, was an absolute Falshood. What he imagin'd might give rise to that Report, was his sending once or twice in a *melancholy Whim* to be prayed for at Church, tho' he never went thither himself; but this was a pretty while ago, occasioned by a violent

Disorder he had met with in a careless Pursuit of his Amours, tho' he was usually as cautious in that Respect as most Gentlemen. However, continued he, I was with him in his last Sickness, when he complain'd to me of the former Meanness of his Spirit, and assur'd me he would never be guilty of such a Trick more. During the Interval of his Fits, he swore and curs'd as heartily as ever I heard him in my Life, and talk'd of his past Frolicks with a great deal of Satisfaction. When some of his Domesticks would have had him send for the Priest, he reply'd with Scorn, that he did not design to profess his Faith in a Creed that he believed nothing of, nor to go out of the World with a Lie in his Mouth; but as he had lived, so he intended to die *a Man of Honour*.

You signified the Horror you felt while the Friend (as he call'd himself) of the Deceased (a little withdrawn from the Throng with his wicked Companions) regal'd himself and them with a Narrative of this Kind on an Occasion *so truly mournful*. Besides the great Number who attended (most of whom knew his Character) were, as you justly apprehend, in danger of following the Example of one, who had past for a great Wit and Scholar in the Neighbourhood where he liv'd. They who had experienced his cruel and oppressive Temper, who had seen him pull'd dead drunk out of his Coach, where



he lay like a Pig in his Ordure ; who knew what a spurious Brood he had left up and down the Country, and some of them in very mean Circumstances ; what Distractions he had caus'd in Families thro' a furious Pursuit of his exorbitant Lusts ; how familiar the most horrid Oaths and Imprecations were with him ; who had often heard him calling on his Maker to damn his Blood and Soul : These, you thought, might easily perswade themselves that *their* future State must at least be as secure as *HIS* ; and that Almighty God would *take their Souls* when *departed*, to *himself* in as *great Mercy* as he did their more vile and scandalous Neighbour's ; because as they had not *his* Education to enhance their Guilt, so neither were they capable, by Reason of their *inferior* Condition, of being in all Respects as bad as himself.

Wherefore you desir'd me, when I had Leisure, to take a Matter of so vast Importance into serious Consideration, and to send you my Thoughts about it, which, as you see, I have now done.

Having weigh'd the Case as sincerely and impartially as I am able in my own Breast, I must therefore freely declare, that tho' I have nothing to say against the Office for Burial of the Dead, *simply considered*, as it lies in the Book of Common Prayer, yet the *promiscuous* and *general* Application of it in the *present* State of Things is indefensible in  
my

my Opinion ; and I have long wonder'd, how so great and learned a Body, as the *English* Clergy are, can satisfy themselves with such poor and low Evasions, as are usually prest into the Service of what they undertake the Vindication of ; and what Pains have been taken to confound and puzzle Common Sense. Were this Part of our Liturgy penned in *Latin*, or wrapt up in less intelligible Phrases in *English*, or were the Expressions in it so ambiguous and double-fac'd, as to admit of a different Meaning suited to the different Characters of the Persons interred ; even *then* it would be justly obnoxious to Exceptions. But when the Words are plain and significant, the Sense clear and strong, so that not one in ten Thousand of the Populace can fail of understanding it, what avails an absurd Philosophising on Terms, *designedly* to cast Obscurity upon them ? I must confess in the Schools logical or metaphysical Quibbles and Subtilties, so far as they only serve to sharpen and improve the Genius of a younger Student, may be more innocent ; while they are only imploy'd about a dry, and comparatively useless Question : But in Affairs of everlasting Moment, when the immortal Souls of Men are concern'd, I am amaz'd to think, that Gentlemen can satisfy themselves with *mental Precisions*, when those under their Care are led into a most dangerous Delusion.

The

The Want of a godly Discipline amongst us, which we acknowledge ourselves to be at present without, and for some Scores of Years have pretended earnestly to wish the Restoration of, is sufficient to engage the laying aside of *that* which nothing besides the Return of such a Discipline *in some Perfection* can now justify the *constant* Use of.

Many Divines assert the *Impossibility* of a Death-bed Repentance; but they who don't carry the Matter so far, yet allow, that it is absolutely impossible such a Repentance should be *known*, because the necessary Characteristicks or Signs thereof are wanting; a virtuous and holy Life being the only Evidence of our Sincerity: And 'tis a Truth too well known, confirm'd by sad Experience, that Sick-bed Promises and Resolutions frequently come to nothing; the Goodness of *such Penitents* being like the morning Cloud or early Dew which soon passeth away, *returning like Dogs to the Licking up of their Vomit*, or the *washed Swine to their wallowing in the Mire*; nay, 'tis observable, that their Lusts break forth with greater Fury, like Waters damm'd for a while, when the Sluices and Flood-gates are open'd, bearing down all before them; so that the latter End with such is far worse than the Beginning.

Wherefore it must unavoidably be granted that Multitudes are buried, of whose future Happiness there is not the least Probability.

What



What then can they do who read over their Graves such Expressions as were *originally* designed for those who, in the Judgment of a prudential Charity, are true Christians, and (tho' the Church does not judge of hidden Things) must be reckon'd *at least* VISIBLE Saints? Why of course they find themselves obliged to hunt for new Senses, to torture perplex and wire-draw the most distinct and obvious Meanings. For instance,

Whereas 'tis said, that " Almighty God " hath *taken to himself* the Soul of our dear " Brother or Sister here departed," they'll understand hereby only in general a *Return of the Spirit to God that gave it*, as in *Eccl. xii. 7.* to be judged by him, and fixed in a State of Rewards or Punishments according to its respective Behaviour in the Body, in direct Opposition to Scripture Language; God's or Christ's taking Persons *thus*, always denoting their future Felicity. Our Saviour saith to his Disciples, *John xiv. 3. And if I go and prepare a Place for you I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also.* The believing Hebrews are said, *Heb. xii. 23. to come to the general Assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the Spirits of just Men made perfect.* The holy Psalmist committed his Spirit into the Hands of that God, who had redeemed him, *Psal. xxxi. 5.*

As

As the great Redeemer himself did afterwards, when he hung on the Cross, *Luke xxiii. 46. Father into thine Hands I commend my Spirit.* 'Twas then also that he said to the converted Thief, *ver. 43. To Day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.* Contrariwise Sinners shall be for ever separated from God, *Matt. vii. 23. Depart from me, ye that work Iniquity.* *Matt. xxv. 41. Depart from me, ye cursed into everlasting Fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels.* These shall be punished with everlasting Destruction from the Presence of the Lord, and from the Glory of his Power, *2 Thess. i. 9.*

But had the Phrase *taken to himself* in sacred Writ been applied to Good and Bad, yet those Words of *his great Mercy* are a certain Restriction of the Sense ; yet there's a superfine Comment put upon them by the Learned. Some will have it, that God shews his great Mercy towards them in judging the Ungodly *himself* (who will judge righteously and impartially) not leaving 'em and their final State to the more uncertain Decision or Determination of any besides ; as if 'twere possible for them to fare worse in the Hands of others, than of infinite, inflexible Justice itself, when the Measure of their Abominations is fill'd up, and long-abused Patience is at last turned into Fury. The God, with whom such Rebels are concern'd is one that *will by no means clear the Guilty*, *Exod. xxxiv.*

7. Numb. xiv. 18. Nothing is more strongly and vehemently asserted both in the Old and New Testament, than this great, this eternal Truth; that all who have rejected *Mercy*, when most graciously, seasonably, repeatedly, importunately offer'd them, shall find *none* at last, with whatever Shrieks or Exclamations they may solicit the same. Let it not therefore be deem'd a Piece of Pedantry or Impertinence to collect a few Texts to this Purpose, *Psal. xi. 6. Upon the Wicked be shall rain Snares, Fire and Brimstone, and an horrible Tempest; this shall be the Portion of their Cup.* Prov. i. 24.-----31. *Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my Hand, and no Man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my Counsel, and would none of my Reproof: I also will laugh at your Calamity, I will mock when your Fear cometh; when your Fear cometh as Desolation, and your Destruction cometh as a Whirlwind; when Distress and Anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated Knowledge, and did not choose the Fear of the Lord. They would none of my Counsel: They despised all my Reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the Fruit of their own Way, and be filled with their own Devices.* Prov. iii. 34. *Surely he scorneth the Scorners.* Prov. xiv. 32. *The Wicked is driven away in his Wickedness.* Isai. iii. 11. *Wo unto the*  
C
Wicked,



*Wicked, it shall be ill with him; for the Reward of his Hands shall be given him. Isai. xxviii. 11. For it is a People of no Understanding: therefore he that made them will not have Mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no Favour. Matt. iii. 10. Every Tree which bringeth not forth good Fruit is hewn down and cast into the Fire. Ver. 12. He will burn up the Chaff with unquenchable Fire. There are no less than Eight Wo's denounce on the hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees. Matt. xxiii. Verses 13, 14, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29. Saint Paul in the several Epistles which he writes unto the Churches, tho' he considers them as Christians and Saints, yet intermixeth many solemn and awful Declarations of approaching Vengeance on finally impenitent Sinners, and takes frequent Occasion to represent the Terrors as well as Comforts, Threatnings as well as Promises of the Gospel, knowing that there would be a Transmission of the Things he wrote to after Ages. Rom. i. 18. For the Wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all Ungodliness, and Unrighteousness of Men, who hold the Truth in Unrighteousness. Rom. ii. 3---6. And thinkest thou this, O Man, that judgest them which do such Things, and dost the same, that thou shalt escape the Judgment of God? Or despisest thou the Riches of his Goodness, and Forbearance, and Long-suffering; not knowing that the Goodness of God leadeth thee to Repentance?*

pentance? But after thy Hardness and im-  
 penitent Heart, treasurest up unto thyself Wrath  
 against the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the  
 righteous Judgment of God, who will render  
 to every Man according to his Works. Ver. 8, 9.  
 Unto them that are contentious, and do not obey  
 the Truth, but obey Unrighteousness, Indigna-  
 tion and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish upon  
 every Soul of Man that doth Evil, of the Jew  
 first, and also of the Gentile. Ver. 11. For  
 there is no Respect of Persons with God.  
 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. Know ye not that the Un-  
 righteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God?  
 Be not deceived: Neither Fornicators, nor  
 Idolaters, nor Adulterers, nor Effeminate, nor  
 Abusers of themselves with Mankind, nor  
 Thieves, nor Covetous, nor Drunkards, nor  
 Revilers, nor Extortioners, shall inherit the  
 Kingdom of God. 2 Cor. v. 10, 11. For we  
 must all appear before the Judgment-Seat of  
 Christ, that every one may receive the Things  
 done in his Body, according to that he hath  
 done whether it be good or bad. Knowing  
 therefore the Terror of the Lord we perswade  
 Men. Gal. v. 19.--21. Now the Works of the  
 Flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery,  
 Fornication, Uncleaness, Lasciviousness, Ido-  
 latry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance, Emu-  
 lations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Heresies,  
 Envyings, Murders, Drunkenness, Revellings,  
 and such like: Of the which I tell you before,  
 as I have also told you in Time past, that they

which do such Things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. Gal. vi. 7, 8. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a Man soweth that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his Flesh, shall of the Flesh reap Corruption: But he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap Life everlasting. Phil. iii. 18, 19. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the Enemies of the Cross of Christ. Whose End is Destruction, &c. Col. iii. 5, 6. Mortify therefore your Members which are upon the Earth; Fornication, Uncleaness, inordinate Affection, evil Concupiscence, and Covetousness, which is Idolatry: For which Thing's sake, the Wrath of God cometh on the Children of Disobedience. 1 Tim. v. 24. Some Mens Sins are open before hand, going before to Judgment, and some they follow after. Jam. ii. 13. He shall have Judgment without Mercy, that hath shewed no Mercy. Rev. xxi. 8. But the Fearful, and Unbelieving, and the Abominable, and Murderers and Whoremongers, and Sorcerers, and Idolaters, and all Liars, shall have their Part in the Lake which burneth with Fire and Brimstone; which is the second Death. Ver. 27. And there shall in no wise enter into it any Thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh Abomination, or maketh a Lie. Rev. xxii. 14, 15. Blessed are they that do his Commandments, that they may have Right to the Tree of Life, and may enter in  
through



*through the Gates into the City. For without are Dogs, and Sorcerers, and Whoremongers, and Murderers, and Idolaters, and whatsoever loveth and maketh a Lie.*

When the Terms of divine Acceptance are perspicuously held forth in the infallible Records, so that he who runs may read them, and there is such an inseparable Connection betwixt Holiness in *this* Life, and Happiness in the *next*, Heb. xii. 14. a Denial of all Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, a sober, righteous and godly Demeanor here, and a *rational Looking for that blessed Hope, and the glorious Appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*, Tit. ii. 12, 13. exhibited unto us: None will have Reason to complain that They had not fair Warning given them, (whatever Atheistical Notions they entertain'd, or how *far* soever they *put the evil Day* from them) when the great *Jehovah* shall glorify the several Perfections of his Essence, which will shine forth in his terrible Animadversions on daring and insolent Contemners of his Authority. The divine Omnipotence, Omniscience, Omnipresence, consummate Holiness, &c. must be honoured as well as his Mercy. That pure and perfect Law, which hath been so wilfully and frequently transgressed, must be vindicated from the Affronts and Indignities offered unto it, in such a Manner that every Mouth will be stopt in a Judgment Day.

Some

Some insinuate that it is *great Mercy* for a wicked Man to be cut off, before he commits more Sins, as very probably he would do, were his Life prolonged. There being Degrees of Torment in Hell, as may be gathered from those Words of Christ to the Scribes and Pharisees, in *Matt. xxiii. 44. Ye shall receive the greater Damnation.* As it would be some sort of Mercy or Clemency in a Prince only to punish a Traitor with the Gallows or Scaffold instead of burning him alive, or breaking him on the Wheel.

But this will appear a very imperfect Way of Reasoning if we examine our Bibles, where we find that *bloody and deceitful Men shall not live out half their Days*, *Psal. lv. 23. I have seen the Wicked in great Power, and spreading himself like a green Bay-tree. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not: Yea, I sought him, but he could not be found, Psal. xxxvii. 35, 36. Surely thou didst set them in slippery Places: Thou castedst them down into Destruction. How are they brought into Desolation, as in a Moment: They are utterly consumed with Terrors, Psal. lxxiii. 18, 19.* How soon soever the Sinner is therefore snatched out of this World, it can't be said, without a most violent *Catachresis*, or Abuse of Speech, to be *in great Mercy*. The Righteous indeed are *thus* taken away from the Evil to come, for their Souls *enter into Peace*, and their Bodies *rest in their Beds*, *Isai. lvii.*

1, 2. But *whenever, wherever or however* a Rebel against his Maker leaves this present Life, he is taken away in *Wrath*. He is then depriv'd of all Opportunities for getting or doing Good. Whilst there is Breath (we proverbially say) there's Hope. And Despair of infinite Mercy in those who are under some Convictions of Sin and Duty is as great a Sin as Presumption. The Words of the King of *Nineveh* at the Preaching of *Jonah* are applicable by all to themselves, who are yet on this Side Hell, *Jon. iii. 9. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce Anger, that we perish not?* This Life is a Seedness for Eternity: And tho' Delays are exceeding dangerous, and it is the highest Folly and Madness to procrastinate Repentance, yet those who have acted so absurd a Part must not abandon themselves to Desperation, nor hearken to Satan if he tempts them to set Bounds to Almighty Grace. They who are spared long can't be sufficiently thankful to divine Patience, that their Sun did not set at Noon, that they were not assaulted by the King of Terrors long since in the Commission of some gross and heinous Sin. *The Lord is not slack concerning his Promise, (saith St. Peter) as some Men count Slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance, 2 Pet. iii. 9.* If then the Continuance of Life be a great Mercy



Mercy to such who are not as yet qualified for an Admission into a better State, it can't possibly be averr'd *in any Sense*, that *they* are taken by God to himself *in great Mercy*. One who has forfeited his Life by Treachery and Perfidiousness to an *earthly* Monarch would surely think himself more mercifully dealt with to be granted a Reprieve from the mildest and easiest Death that he could pass under, than to be immediately executed, especially if he were ascertain'd of an absolute Pardon on his future Amendment and Reformation, tho' on the other hand, he should be threatned with the most exquisite Torments in case he persisted in his Treasons. The coldest Place in the *bottomless Pit* is too hot to be desir'd; nor can any one, who is not arriv'd to the utmost Stupidity and Indolence, read or hear of it without Horror.

But I farther observe, that there is no Limitation of *this Clause* to any particular Time of Life. Persons of every Age, whether Infants, young Men, middle aged, or such as have past the Age of Men, nay *wondrous old* are equally Sharers in it. The Sinner of an hundred Years old (tho' accursed, having his Bones full of the Sins of his Youth, tho' a faithful Servant to the Devil all his Days, and perfect Drudge to his Lusts) shall be thus honour'd at his Grave. I must confess for my Part, whatever Regard was due to the hoary Head of such a one *while alive*, I

can't see why it must be extended *any farther*. Peradventure 'twas a Mercy to his Neighbours, his Family, and his Country, to have him taken away. For *one Sinner* (saith Solomon) *destroys much Good*, especially an old Sinner, if to this it be superadded, that he was in a publick Station.

“ We therefore commit his Body to the  
 “ Ground in sure and certain Hope of the  
 “ Resurrection to Eternal Life.” A great deal of Pains hath been taken to qualify these Words, that they may be fitted for a Christian Divine to read over the Graves of all kinds of Sinners.

By *the Resurrection* then, some understand a Resurrection *in general* without any *special* Respect to the Person deceased. But if there will be an universal Rising again in the last Day both of the Just and of the Unjust, the Person interred is *necessarily included*. 'Tis also a Resurrection to *Eternal Life*, that there is a *sure and certain Hope* of. But by *Eternal Life*, some only mean an Eternal Duration, as opposed to an utter Extinction or Annihilation. Bad as well as good Men will have an Immortality stamp upon them. But then 'tis queried, whether such an Interpretation doth not make the Expression appear very odd, to say the best of it. For if Eternal Misery may be meant as well as Eternal Happiness, a sure and certain Hope of a Resurrection to endless Torments sounds

D                      perfect

perfect Nonsense in vulgar Ears, whatever some very sublime and mysterious Metaphysicians may say to the contrary, who tell us, that a *miserable Being is better than none at all*, in flat Contradiction to our Saviour's Assertion concerning Judas, Matt. xxvi. 24. *It had been good for that Man, if he had not been born.* But however that be; the Term LIFE when it signifies a future State doth constantly denote in sacred Scripture HAPPINESS. So Matt. xix. 16. *What good Thing shall I do that I may have Eternal Life?* ver. 17. *If thou wilt enter into Life, keep the Commandments.* Matt. vii. 14. *Narrow is the Way which leadeth unto Life.* Rom. vi. 22. *Ye have your Fruits unto Holiness, and the End everlasting Life.* John v. 28, 29. *The Hour is coming in which all that are in the Graves shall hear his Voice; and shall come forth, they that have done Good unto the Resurrection of Life, and they that have done Evil to the Resurrection of Damnation.* Matt. xxv. 46. *These shall go away into everlasting Punishment: But the Righteous into Life Eternal.* The State of the Damned is therefore call'd, in contradistinction hereunto, *Death*, the *second Death*. Rom. vi. 23. *The Wages of Sin is Death, but the Gift of God is Eternal Life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Rev. ii. 11. *He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second Death.*

Some



Some therefore say, that tho' there will be a Resurrection of all to one State or other, yet there is no Necessity of supposing the buried Person to have a Resurrection *himself* to Eternal Life, but an Hope of an happy Resurrection for *all such as rest in Christ*, &c. But how trifling and impertinent such a Gloss is, appears at first View. *John's* Body, we must then suppose, committed to the Ground in sure and certain Hope, not of *John's* Resurrection to Eternal Life, but of *Peter's*, *Thomas's*, *James's*, and all other good People's Resurrection to such a Life. And it is a great Reflexion on the Learning and Judgment of those who compiled our Liturgy, to suppose them capable of expressing themselves in so raw and ambiguous a Manner. 'Tis indeed suggested, **THE** Resurrection, not **HIS** Resurrection is mention'd; but the sole Reason of this seems to be the avoiding of a Tautology, the Word *his* occurring before in the same Clause; and the Sense equally clear without the Repetition of it.

There's also an handsome Transition from an affecting and pathetical Deprecation in the preceding Words made for the *Living*, to a solemn Declaration of our Hopes concerning the *Dead*, which gives it a more beautiful and observable Emphasis. In opposition to *the bitter Pains of Eternal Death*, which we pray to be *delivered from*, a *sure and certain Hope* of our Brother's Resurrection to

*eternal Life* is asserted: When we intreat Almighty God *not to suffer us for any Pains of Death* to FALL FROM HIM, we testify our Assurance in the following Words, that he hath been pleased to TAKE UNTO HIMSELF *the Soul of our dear Brother here departed.*

But such a woful Mangling and Defalcation of *this Form*, such a Cutting off the several Parts of it from their just Coherence with, and Dependance on, one another, as makes it *really ridiculous*, seems necessary to accommodate it to the present unlimited Use made thereof, so that every Drunkard, Swearer, Whoremonger, &c. may be welcome to it.

Indeed the bare Recital of that Text in *Rev. xiv. 13.* over a scandalous, profligate Wretch when laid in the Earth, tho' not intended by the Gentleman who officiates to be particularly applied unto him, is very improper and unseasonable, forasmuch as the unthinking Crowd will be apt to receive undue Impressions thereby, and too easily understand it, as an *Encomium* on the *Deceas'd.* But the Words following are so distinctly and clearly applicable to the Person interred, that 'tis absolutely impossible for a Man in his Senses to mistake the Compiler's Meaning; and being written in a *nervous* and *masculine* Style, the Words (tho' few, yet very comprehensive) are enough (if delivered with a becoming Pathos) to charm a pious and devout

vout Auditory surrounding the Grave of one to whom they *properly belong*.

“ Almighty God, with whom do live the  
 “ Spirits of them that depart hence in the  
 “ Lord, and with whom the Souls of the  
 “ Faithful after they are delivered from the  
 “ Burden of the Flesh are in Joy and Felicity ; we give thee hearty Thanks, for  
 “ that it hath pleased thee to deliver this our  
 “ *Brother* out of the Miseries of this sinful  
 “ World, &c.

But what a Nauseousness must it raise in every serious Breast to hear such lively and eloquent Expressions prostituted to support and increase the Devil's Kingdom ? One has well observed, that the giving of a great Man his Titles of Honour on a dying Bed is absurd, and to call him his *Worship*, or to ask him how his *Excellency*, &c. doth, may be interpreted mere Mockery and Insult : It seems to me, I must confess, not only a *Trampling* on the Memory of a poor damned Soul, but also a grave and formal *mocking* of the great God, when hearty Thanks are given *him* with *our Lips* for delivering such a One from the Miseries of this sinful World, when we have just Reason to *believe* he is suffering the Vengeance of eternal Fire. A wicked great Man is indeed (delivered, or rather) *driven* from a magnificent Seat, from Rooms of State, sumptuous Feasts, a splendid Equipage, delicious Gardens, mid-day and  
 midnight



midnight Revellings and Debaucheries, in fine, from whatsoever *his Soul desired*. These, I own, may be too justly (but sadly) styled the *Miseries of this Life* with Relation to every one, who has been cheated, by these mischievous Amusements, these varnishing Trifles, out of *Glory, Honour, Immortality and Life Eternal*. The rich Man in the Parable recorded in the sixteenth Chapter of St. *Luke's Gospel*, must have thought himself more flouted and derided than he was, had Father *Abraham* thanked God for a Deliverance, *Catachrestically* so called, from those Things he had *now* a bitter *Remembrance* of. A Discharge to a Saint from the Afflictions and Calamities of this Life, is a great Mercy, even tho' they *befriend* his Preparations for Heaven, for none of these Things are *now joyous but grievous*, consider'd in themselves; and a *far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory* will be the happy Result of them. But the most distressing Circumstances which God's Enemies (whether poor or rich) are *here* under, must be far more *eligible* than the mildest Punishment in the infernal Lake.

“ We meekly beseech thee, O Father,  
 “ to raise us from the Death of Sin unto the  
 “ Life of Righteousness, that when we shall  
 “ depart this Life, we may rest in him, as  
 “ *our Hope is this our Brother doth.* (12)

This last Clause, were there nothing else, is sufficient to make us conclude, that the

Order for the Burial of the Dead, was only composed for *them*, of whose future Happiness we have a *rational* Hope. But they who are for an indiscriminate Use of it are reduc'd to a Necessity of distinguishing betwixt Hope and Hope. They are willing to suppose that the Hope here mention'd differs from that *sure* and *certain* Hope spoken of before. Whereas these Epithets *sure* and *certain* seem to be omitted only to guard against a needless Tautology. For why must the Hope of a Brother's or Sister's *Resting in Christ* be more feeble and languid, than an Hope of their *Resurrection to Eternal Life*? But some would fain persuade us, that we may have a lower Degree of Hope concerning the worst of Men, while they continue such, notwithstanding the most positive and peremptory Assertions in the infallible Records to the contrary. Thus speaketh St. Paul to the *Ephesians*, Eph. ii. 12. *That at that Time ye were without Christ, being alienated from the Common-wealth of Israel, and Strangers from the Covenants of Promise, having no Hope, and without God in the World.* The most Hopeless may indeed become Hopeful. 1 Cor. vi. 11. *And such were some of you; but ye are washed, &c.* But this we must rest assured of, that there is not the least Grain of Hope to be conceived for open, pertinacious, headstrong Rebels, before there is some Appearance of Reformation. *For this ye know,* (Eph.

(Eph. v. 5.) *that no Whoremonger or unclean Person, nor covetous Man, who is an Idolater, hath any Inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God.* It then looks like unjustifiable Boldness to declare our Hopes of any to whom the forementioned Characters appertain. Charity, tho' it *hopeth all Things, believeth all Things*, yet erreth, if it hopes or believes any Thing repugnant to plain and undoubted Revelation. That is execrable Charity indeed, which makes the God of Truth a Liar, as well as tends to ruin the precious Souls of Men. Tho' some Regard should be paid to the old Maxim, *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, and we should not unnecessarily say any thing contemptible of the *Dead*; yet if Ministers are enjoined to say *Something* in a publick Manner concerning a notorious, graceless Villain, they ought, I conceive, so to express themselves, as not to poison the *Living*. It would therefore be more agreeable to the Principles of our holy Religion, to alter a little, on such Occasions, the Burial Office, or rather to make one entirely new. To give a brief Specimen hereof.

“ Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty  
 “ God, of his great *Wisdom* and *Righteous-*  
 “ *ness*, to *require* the Soul of this Wretch  
 “ here departed : We therefore commit his  
 “ Body to the Ground, Earth to Earth,  
 “ Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust, in sure and  
 “ certain



“ certain *Fear* of the Resurrection to *eternal*  
 “ *Damnation*, &c.

We can as certainly declare our *Fears* of the eternal State of bad Men, as our *Hopes* of good Men. I allow, 'tis possible sometimes to be mistaken in *both*. There may be Hypocrites who make a fair Shew in the Flesh, whom Interest, Reputation, or Want of Opportunities to commit Sin so publicly, as others do, may keep sober; or they may be more *wary* and *artful* in sinning than some of their Neighbours. However, we are oblig'd to think and speak well of them, while they remain undiscovered; and Ministers may very justly apply every Part of the Burial Office to them. So I won't say, 'tis utterly impossible for the most flagitious Criminal to be converted in his *last Moments*. Had *Saul*, whose eminent Conversion we read of in *Acts* ix. expired before he reach'd *Damascus*, nay as soon as a blessed *Turn* had been given to his Mind, he could have been as happy as the converted Thief was. Let us suppose Almighty Grace to change a very heinous Sinner, labouring likewise under such a Disorder as necessarily prevents his testifying *the same*, either by Word or any other Signs (tho' could he do so, it would not deserve to be regarded, unless he could confirm the same by his future Conduct *in this World*) and that he should die of that Illness; there could surely be no Harm in stigmatizing such

a one at his Grave, for a *Warning unto others*. For the Deceased himself could suffer no Harm by it, being safe in Glory, and his wicked Neighbours might receive a great deal of Good. 'Twill also be a very agreeable Surprize to his godly Friends, in a Judgment Day, to find such a one on the Judge's Right-hand, together with themselves.

Our Hopes and Fears may be justly founded, and yet in both we may be mistaken, who can only judge of Mens Hearts by their Actions; but methinks 'tis altogether as requisite and expedient to discourage Vice, as to encourage Virtue, to disgrace Profaneness to the uttermost, as to give Piety and Holiness its due Praise.

I remember to have heard, that when the unhappy Proclamation for Sports and Pastimes on Lord's Days was by Royal Authority to be published in Churches; that some Ministers, when they had read the King's Order, would inform their Congregations of a *superior* Law made by the *King of Kings*, and so read the fourth Commandment, with some other Texts of like Import. What if some such Method were taken at Funerals, before the *ancient godly Discipline is restored*? And some proper Cautions and Admonitions did either immediately go before, or else follow after the Performance of the Service? I am loth to think any Clergyman would be prosecuted on such a faithful Discharge of his  
Con-

Conscience (especially in a free Age and Nation, in which both our civil and religious Liberties are more perfectly understood than ever they were before) and that *Righteousness which exalteth a Nation*, is like to be promoted hereby. But let surviving Friends be never so angry; and should vexatious Summons to Ecclesiastical Courts, nay Suspension, or total Deprivation be the Issue, doubtless all the external Emoluments of Life ought to be sacrificed to inward Peace.

Some indeed are *legally* exempted, so that a Clergyman lays himself open to no Trouble in refusing to give them Christian Burial. Such are Self-murderers, who yet being *charitably* thought Lunaticks, have commonly the same Respect paid them with others; tho' 'tis to be feared, they only labour (at least many of them) under the same *moral* Madness, that all wicked Men are subject to. *The Sorrow of this World* (saith St. Paul) *worketh Death*. The Losses and Hardships, which good Men bear with Patience (whose Hope is laid up in Heaven) are unsupportable by *him*, whose Portion is in this World. Hence is it that *disappointed* Ambition, Avarice or Luxury, send Persons to the Halter, Sword, Pistol, Water, Poison, &c. for a more speedy Deliverance from the *Miseries of this Life*, while others who have not Courage or Resolution enough to be their own Executioners by such violent Means,



more insensibly pine away with Grief; that *Envy* which *Solomon* calleth the *Rottenness of the Bones*, defeated Malice, or some other predominant Lust, breaking their Hearts. But prosperous Sinners, who don't act like mad Men in the fore-mentioned Instances, may as justly have a Commission of Lunacy issued out against them, as those who are *thus served*; while we consider them designed for Immortality, without using proper Methods to secure to themselves an *happy* one.

Unbaptized Persons are also denied this Privilege; tho' Divines differ here among themselves. Some (who, I believe, are the far greater Part) allowing the Baptism of Dissenters to be valid; others disowning it, as being administered by one not duly authorized: Particularly the learned Mr. *Dodwel* and his Followers, "who confining  
" Immortality to Baptism applied by a fit  
" Administrator, cannot admit this Office to  
" be read over such as are of course annihilat-  
" ed when they die." But (to say no more of that Absurdity) I can't see why such as are allowed to have immortal Souls must, tho' dying unbaptiz'd, be *universally* denied Christian Burial. Nor do I think such as have been baptized, whether in *Infancy* or *since*, if they have renounced their Baptism a thousand Times over (as alas! is the Case of Multitudes) are in any better Condition, if not far worse, than some unbaptized Persons. For Baptism saveth not (saith *St. Peter*) as it is the

*putting*

*putting away of the Filth of the Flesh, but the Answer of a good Conscience towards God,* 1 Pet. iii. 21. There was a prevailing (tho' mistaken) Notion long since, that Sins after *Baptism* were irremissible from that Passage in *Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6.* misinterpreted, wherefore 'twas frequently delayed 'till a Death-bed, and many were baptized in their last Moments. Whether any are imprest with such a Fancy now a-days, I can't say, but 'tis certain that many, who yet believe Water Baptism to be a standing Ordinance in the Church, are too neglectful of their Duty: However, I dare not, *on that pure Consideration*, judge hardly of their Eternal State (*For in many Things we offend all*, Jam. iii. 2.) Nor yet of *Theirs*, who think an inward Baptism *alone* is required of us (how much soever I believe them in the wrong) if nothing else determines me to entertain Doubts of their future State. Nay, the most rigid Anti-pædobaptists, tho' they refuse to receive their Neighbours to Church-fellowship *here*, on the Account of their supposed Error in the Point of Baptism, will not scruple to express their *sure* and *certain Hopes* of their *Everlasting Felicity*. So that the Church of *England* appears to me too limited and confined in her Charity as to *this*, however extensive and unrestrained in other Cases.

So she seems also to be, as to *excommunicated* Persons; I don't mean such as are  
 Scandals

Scandals to human Nature, drinking up Iniquity as the Ox drinketh Water, Enemies to all Righteousness, &c. The Church has been too sparing in her Censures of these; as well as too mild and soft in the Re-admission of those, on whom she has poured out her Anathema's *very deservedly*. There are Crimes which do not immediately intitle Men to the Gallows, that call for other Demonstrations of a sincere Repentance, than *paying the Charges of the Court*, or *doing Penance in a white Sheet*, which they who have a Whore's Forehead, can submit unto without an uneasy Blush. There was a Time, which some antient Persons still remember, when many of the most sober, civiliz'd and religious Subjects in the Kingdom were furiously prosecuted for serving God in that Way which themselves thought most agreeable to his Commands, and suffer'd not only an Excommunication from the established Places of Worship (which they could very chearfully submit unto, if nothing worse had followed; because they had *voluntarily* departed from them before; and thought it very impertinent to be *driven* from a Place by a solemn Sentence which they had on Principles of Conscience *already left*) but were at the same Time excommunicated from all other Houses of Worship, nay, from their own Houses, from their Goods, their Studies, their Wives and Children: While Popish Recusants were over-



overslipped, and the most dissolute and debauched Protestants, tho' they seldom attended on their Parish Churches, liv'd unmolested. And although there has been for some time, and still is (blessed be God) an Exemption from those Severities which our Fathers felt in the Reign of King *Charles* the Second, yet some of our Divines conclude, tho' Dissenters are not liable to formal Excommunications at present, yet *schismatically* abandoning the national Establishment; they must be considered as Persons *ipso facto* excommunicated, and consequently have no Right to that Charity which the Church extendeth to all (however imperfect their Characters otherwise are) who live and die in her Bosom. I believe indeed, there are but few in whom this *fanatical* Squeamishness is found of late, and am willing to take it for granted, that there *are* not such fearful and tragical Out-cry's against *Moderation* as there *were* in the last Age, nor that *many* are so silly and senseless as to imagine that a Non-compliance with *unscriptural* Modes and Ceremonies commanded *only* by Men, is worse than a daring and repeated Violation of the *divine* Laws. But how warm soever the Contest has at any Time been betwixt *High-Church* and *Low Church*, *Whigs* and *Tories*, about other Things, there has been, and still (alas!) is a most unhappy Harmonizing in this SOUL-DAMNING *Moderation*

at

at the Grave. 'Tis *then* that Vice comes off triumphant, that the Clergy demolish their Pulpit Discourses, that the loudest Declamations against Profaneness, and the loftiest Panegyricks on Virtue, meet with a *practical* Confutation. 'Tis then that Gentlemen find a more effectual *Anodyne* against the Gripes and Lashes of Conscience, than what Taverns or Bowling-greens, Horses or Hounds, Hares or Foxes, could give them; 'tis *then and there* also that the *meaner Sort* have there melancholy Frights removed, and after they had made some faint Resolves to lead a new Life, feel themselves brave and easy under the Reception of such a *stupifying Dose*, and return with fresh Vigour to the Repetition of their former Debaucheries; when their Associates in Rioting and Drunkenness, in Chambering and Wantonness, are laid in the Dust with a Prospect of a comfortable Resurrection.

Methinks a Minister, who has a just Concern for the eternal Welfare of those committed to his Charge, should not be able, on that solemn Occasion, to repeat, without a *shuddering Horror*, what being so dreadfully misapplied, saps the Foundations of natural and revealed Religion, and in a *few Minutes* tears up by the Roots, what he hath perhaps many Months and Years been planting. For when there are strong Propensions in human Nature to sensual Gratifications,

with

with how great Attention will every Word and Syllable be heard, that hath a Tendency to Support and cherish them? The common People will look upon *Preaching*, as a Business for a Man to get his Bread by, or at best to keep the Parish in a little Order, when they find their Parson has cut the Throat of all his public Exhortations, Warnings and Threats, *at last*, burying them together with the Corps.

If the careless Application of the Form of *Absolution* pronounced to impenitent Sinners on their Death-beds, hath slain its Thousands, *THIS* hath slain its ten Thousands. For there are but few in the Room, (at least usually) when “ Ministers, by the Authority  
“ committed to them, absolve sick or dying  
“ Persons from all their Sins, in the Name  
“ of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost ;” but there are frequently large Assemblies in Churches or Church-yards, when the last Office of Love is paid by surviving Friends to their deceased ones.

Since the Reformation from Popery, there have doubtless been some *Millions* interred, to whom *this Form* hath been *improperly* applied, and *tens of Millions* more who have been Spectators and Auditors. Nay to be sure, there are in the several Cities, Towns and Villages of *this Kingdom* many Thousands *every Day* throughout the Year, whom common Decency and Civility bring to their

F                      Neigh-



Neighbours Funerals, who seldom hear Sermons; the *poorest* as well as the *richest* too much despising Pulpit Discourses. But many that do not turn their Backs on that important Part of the ministerial Work, don't place it on a Level with the Liturgy, and *think* (however *act* as if they thought) the *Conceptions of particular Persons*, tho' never so learned, ought not to be laid in the Balance with established FORMS, and therefore slight their florid Harangues, whilst they have the CHURCH on their Side.

For which Reason, I wonder not to hear *Libertines* extol it as *the best constituted Church in the World*. The Romanists come often to auricular Confession, take tedious Pilgrimages, suffer many a lusty Whipping, shut themselves up close Prisoners in Monasteries and Nunneries, give a great Part of their Substance to religious Uses; and after all expect to be scoured by very painful Flames in their Way to Heaven. Whereas one of our Latitudinarian Protestants sees no manner of Occasion for all this ado; he loves his Body too well to punish it by fasting or scourging, and if there should be a Place of Happiness (as they talk of) in the other World, he does not doubt of getting thither as well as the best of them all, without so much as calling at *Purgatory* by the Way.

Nay I have sometimes feared lest the constant Rehearsal of Words, applicable *compa-*  
*ratively*

*ratively* to few, should have a pernicious Influence on the Clergy themselves, and reduce them, in process of Time, to an Indolence and Indifferency, so that *they* become less solicitous about getting to that blessed World to which they send their graceless Neighbours.

There have been long and loud Complaints of the World's Degeneracy. The Badness of the Times is a trite Topic in Conversation; various Causes are assigned hereof. Some fix it on the too general Toleration of Schism and Heresies; others on the Want of a Convocation (as if Convocations had either in the last or present Age done any Service to real Godliness;) others on the Growth of Deism; but this I apprehend to be false in Fact, unless Persons *thereby* understand *Hobbism*, *Scepticism* or *Atheism*. But whatever Reasons *besides* may be given, I am thoroughly convinced, that what I have taken notice of in this Paper is *one*, and that the most elaborate Addresses from Pulpit and Prefs, will not be a sufficient Antidote against the Contagion, which a promiscuous Use of the forementioned *Office* conveys. I therefore heartily wish the whole Body of our *English* Clergy would unite in a warm and affectionate Petition to the Legislature, either that the long desired Discipline may be restored, or that *they* may in the mean while have the Liberty to *read* the Burial Service, or to *omit* it,

it, as *Prudence* shall direct ; instead of being put to their Shifts to explain it so, as to make it a Jumble of Inconsistencies. I confess the holy Scriptures themselves have been, and may still be perverted. Poison may be suck'd from those Flowers wherein Bees find Honey ; but surely the Bible is not to be contemned on that Account, because wicked Men abuse it, or lockt up from the common People ; nor are wholesome Meats and Drinks to be forbidden in general, because there are so many Sots and Gluttons. I say this, that I may not be misunderstood, as designing to vilify or depreciate any Part of the Liturgy (tho' I have hinted something of this kind before.) But if we *misapply* Scripture Promises or Threatnings, we are *so far* faulty. As we must not condemn the Generation of the Righteous, so neither must we bless those whom the Lord abhorreth. *He that saith unto the Wicked, thou art righteous, him shall the People curse, Nations shall abhor him,* Prov. xxiv. 24.

I have thus impartially and freely, as becomes an *Englishman* and a Christian, written you my Sentiments on this melancholy Subject, and am,

Sir,

*Your most obedient*

*humble Servant.*